



Rereading History as His Story

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Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

Matthew, Mark and Luke, tell variations of a similar Gospel. At the completion of the first Century, JOHN writes a fresh Gospel. Imagine what would have happened to Literature, Art, Music, Architecture, Science, if NO Gospel had ever been told? If you were to describe the coming of the Savior of the World, if you were to write the Gospel of Jesus Christ, what would you say or do? Would you make a video? Paint a picture, would you write a narrative? Sing a song? How would you tell Jesus' story? How would you tell the Gospel? How important are images like "The Word became Flesh?" "A Light in the Dark?" Would you try to portray Jesus Coming in the time of the Roman Empire, or Another time, even Today?

A basic question we need to consider about the Bible, is that all people, even all people who believe in God through Jesus Christ, even all of us at Valley Church, do not receive the Scriptures in the same way. To some, the Bible is Myth and stories; to others Historic Fact; to others Inspired Theological Truth; to others the Sacred Literal Word of God. That distinction defines the shades of grey in our claims of what is Sacred, Holy, what is Mystical, and what is Truth.

Some among us lived through the Great War, having a personification for EVIL; for some of us, the closest we might come is of those who planned and executed September 11th. Some of us come from Washington, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York where we know a great deal about people who live in darkness, and are only accustomed to witnessing light for 20 to 30 days per year! Coming to Arizona with over 300 days of sunlight annually, for me, feels like a people who have lived in deep darkness suddenly overwhelmed by light.

We also need to differentiate between having an exact Translation of the Bible, versus a Transliteration, because both are referred to as being The Bible. A Translation translates from the Ancient Text directly word for word, then adjusts the words in sentences for context. A Transliteration tells the story, without concern for individual words or phrases. Even more, different believers among us, have attempted to preach the Gospel to different audiences for different purposes, and with different agenda. Those painting a contemporary picture, in words or art, are expressing a transliteration of the mood and feeling and ideas of the Bible; where as those portraying an exact literal translation want to be Sacred & Orthodox, at least to know what Orthodox was as we propose Re-Formations; which is why Presbyterian Ministers have to graduate Seminary with a working knowledge of both Hebrew and of Greek and the ability to translate and use that knowledge in interpreting the Bible for a Sermon.

In 2002, in Colorado, Biblical Scholar and Christian Theologian Eugene Peterson published his Contemporary Transliteration of the whole Bible, that he called *The Message*.

Peterson does not attempt to use the overwhelming poetry of John's "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God! He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that was made." But John called attention to a different starting point for WHEN & HOW the INCARNATION CAME TO BE. Did Jesus become ONE with the Father at his Baptism as in Mark? Was he conceived in a lineage from Abraham, through David, as in

Matthew? Was he descended from the Priestly lineage of Aaron and Moses, born in a humble Stable for common Shepherds to witness? ACCORDING TO JOHN, the Spirit of Jesus and God were ONE from before the beginning of Time, before Genesis! As such, God may be described as invisible and intangible and eternal... HOWEVER, the Wisdom of God, the Logos, our desire to make tangible and real the divine truth and pure light of God, becomes mortal in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. How would you say that?

When describing the Prologue of the Gospel of John, Eugene Peterson wrote

“The Word was made flesh-and-blood, who moved into our neighborhood. We saw Glory, the one of a kind glory, like father-like son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.” What we gain from the Gospel of Eugene, is a personal identification for us with the Messiah. “The Word was made Flesh and Blood”, no longer theoretical, no longer intangible, or ideal, or Myth, a part of God became REAL, 3 Dimensional. Except, I said that incorrectly, **Jesus did not do this by himself!** God the Creator, made him be made Flesh and Blood. Just as later when Jesus died and was resurrected, **he did not resurrect himself, God did!** Everyone does not have a great personal relationship between parent and child, but as I have now surpassed 60, I see my Father’s eyes in the mirror, and occasionally his jowls. My hands and feet have become more like his. And in childhood photos of my own now adult sons, I see myself reflected. Eugene does not simply say that Jesus looked like God, but that Like Father-Like Son, they are cut from the same cloth, One of a Kind in glory, both are generous inside and out, both are The Absolute of Truth. But what I love most about “This Gospel of Eugene” version is his description that “the Word made flesh-and-blood ‘moved into our neighborhood.’” Each of us have an image of what our neighborhood was like. Whether Rural or Urban, in North America or elsewhere, Neighborhood is a tangible image of OUR HOME. The place where we climbed trees, rode bicycles, grew up from being toddlers to adults. Neighborhood is Personal to each of us. In Jesus, God moved into our Neighborhood.

In the 1600s, Rembrandt painted “The Holy Family” as if in his own time, place and culture. Everything is painted as if in a typical Dutch home of the 17th Century. Mary is seated with an open well-worn book in her left hand, while her right hand has pulled aside a cover on a rocking cradle to reveal the baby Jesus. Mary’s head is turned from her reading of the Bible to stare at her child. Behind them, slightly in shadows is Joseph carving wooden shoes. Above him are cherubim. Rembrandt pictures Mary as knowing her well her Bible and contemplating the Scriptures in her Heart. She stares at the infant, her infant, the WORD MADE FLESH, turning away from the Word of pen and ink on paper. When Mary returns to her reading of Scripture she will understand differently, more deeply because she has encountered the Word made flesh. When she holds and comforts the child she will understand the babe differently because she has encountered the Word through words of Scripture. Compared to Luke’s warm Christmas image of a newborn in a manger, in a stable of fresh straw, with shepherds, Rembrandt’s 17th Century “Holy Family” seems odd, yet an accurate portrayal of this believer in his time receiving the Gospel in both Printed Word and Word made Flesh.

If we had only John’s Gospel, we would never have had Christmas Carols, or Christmas Pageants, or Creches; but if we did not have John’s Gospel we would not have the Theological Proclamations that “All things came into being through him, without him nothing was made that was made.” As we are in the first week of this New Year, may we develop a fuller, richer faith by both reading the Scriptures and encountering the Word made flesh in each of our lives, in sacrament, and prayer and service in the Church, in this place, and our homes throughout the world, in all creation, in neighbors and family, because all things come into being through Him.

George Herbert, was a Poet overlapping time with Rembrandt, the two never seemed to have met or known each other's work, but Herbert wrote what could have been a caption to the painting

We say amiss, this or that is Truth: Thy Word is All in All, if we could spell.
How do you spell The WORD? Where do you search and look?
Amidst the coos and cries you have heard or in a well-thumbed book?
Hold back the swift reply, the pious worn cliché,
that softens how the child will die when violence has it's way.
Instead, let all you do embody truth and grace, and you will spell the word anew
in every time and place.